

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY  
FY2012 Social Innovation Fund Grant Competition

<b>Legal Applicant Name: Capital Area United Way</b>	<b>Application ID: 12SI138968</b>
<b>Program Name: CAUW Social Innovation Fund</b>	

*For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. This feedback is provided on a restricted basis and cannot be shared or distributed outside of your organization. We hope you will find this information helpful in completing applications to our future grant competitions. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of your application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory.*

*There were two stages of expert review for the 2012 SIF competition, the Program Review focused on the quality of the applicant's response in most of the Program Design and Organizational Capability sections and all of the Cost Effectiveness/Budget Adequacy section.*

**Program Reviewers' Summary Comments:**

- The applicant's choice of target area and population segments is supported with significant statistical information related to the respective needs. This selection strategy will incorporate the subgrantees into the evaluation process, which will help ensure the likelihood of meeting the effectiveness requirement and collecting the appropriate evidence over the grant period. Also, its significant experience in selecting and awarding competitive grants to nonprofits, along with the current staff capacity and organizational resources, will enable the applicant to successfully undertake the subgrant selection process. Moreover, through its experience in program investment and managing volunteer support activities, the applicant provides evidence of its ability to support the subgrantees with technical assistance and other services.

The applicant also possesses the requisite skills, experience and organizational capacity to successfully support and oversee grantee programs. The applicant also possesses the requisite skills, experience and organizational capacity in the area of providing financial support and oversight to grantees. It has built a strong management team, board of directors and advisory panel, who possess the requisite skills and experiences to effectively implement the proposed program. In addition, the applicant has designed a reasonable strategy for sustaining the financial support that would fund the proposed activities beyond the initial grant period. Moreover, with an established presence in the local market, the applicant has relationships with a significant number of corporate giving programs, as well as with local foundations. Lastly, on the basis of the budget narrative, which provides a detailed description for the major line-item expenditures associated with this project, the applicant's proposed budget should be sufficient to launch the project, evaluate the subgrantees' performance, and support the activities that will achieve the targeted results.

On the other hand, although it identified a specific measurement tool to track the outcomes of its activities, the applicant failed to cite quantifiable metrics for its expected performance. It does not provide a complete profile of the organizations to be funded as subgrantees. Similarly, it didn't offer a full description of the growth characteristics that each subgrantee must possess or any indication of their relative importance or priority. Furthermore, the applicant did not provide a clear description of how it will capture and share best practices for its proposed activities.

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- The applicant convincingly targeted the need of Greater Baton Rouge's 10-parish area towards nonprofits that focus on early childhood success and the link to economic well-being. By targeting their investments both geographically and programmatically, the applicant will be able to serve one of the most philanthropically underserved regions in the country.

Although the applicant describes that the measure of success to indicate that children are entering school ready to learn will be provided by the EDI, they do not clearly identify the measurable outcomes that will be achieved through this initiative. However, the applicant does not include many details, including the exact educational measures and outcomes.

The applicant clearly demonstrated that they have a clear and comprehensive plan for carrying out a competitive subgrantee selection process. However, the grantee does not provide enough detail to describe the measurable outcomes that the subgrantee organization will ultimately produce.

The applicant succinctly articulated its theory to growing an effective subgrantee program model, by documenting the staffing procedure that will be used to contact, monitor and evaluate subgrantees' program and capacity development.

The applicant appears to have an extensive means of supporting subgrantee growth through expertise, resources, and partnerships. They provide a plan for technical assistance and have effective collaborative resources to subgrantee growth.

The applicant will be creating a new indicator system, which will leave many of the outcomes measurements in the hands of the subgrantees. This process will be completed during the first three to nine months of the initiative. The elective indicators will then be aggregated across the sites that use them. Although this process is described, the list of characteristics and the outcome indicators that the applicants will use to monitor the subgrantees are not well defined or specific enough.

The applicant has extensive experience selecting and awarding competitive grants to nonprofits, including an 85-year history and distributions totaling over six million dollars last year. The data driven process and rigorous selection criteria adequately demonstrate the capacity that the applicant has to undertake the subgrant selection process.

The applicant is proposing detailed budgets that will support the capacity necessary to achieve desired outputs and outcomes on a staffing level. The majority of the funding will be given to subgrantees, with an adequate amount allocated to the applicant's program cost and overhead expenses. The budget as it is proposed is reasonable and will support a successful subgrantee program growth and provide the overhead for a successful selection process.

The applicant also presents a compelling plan for securing the match commitment by foundations and corporations through relationships already developed, including their relationship with the Baton Rouge Area Foundation and the Pennington Family Foundation, as well as industrial corporations such as ExxonMobil. They present adequate efforts to assist subgrantees to secure their required match, by describing how they will establish partnerships from their board and executive leadership to support subgrantees in their pursuit of the match funds. The applicant will also facilitate meetings and presentations to community funders on behalf of the subgrantees.

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- The applicant does not clearly state the specific community needs to be addressed through the program and presents limited relevant statistical information for the needs related to the geography in which their program will be focused. At least four of the statistical presentations provided in the Goals and Objectives section refer to either “multiple studies” or “research” but fail to cite specific research or provide a sufficient summary of the nature of the research and relevant conclusions.

The applicant refers to broad indicators of child well-being – infant mortality, low birth weights, teen births, maternal education and marital status -- and indicates that the catchment areas served by the program lags behind. The applicant does not demonstrate why these indicators are the most important nor does it provide external verification of these as the most crucial indicators relevant to the goals and objectives of the proposed program. Additionally, there are no statistics provided for the current rates of these indicators or a proposed percent improvement as a result of the program.

The applicant fails to provide a clear profile of the type of subgrantee organization they expect to fund.

The applicant presents a strong and thorough subgrantee selection process focused on transparency and competitiveness beginning with a letter of inquiry process to immediately flag any areas of additional outreach required to ensure a competitive process and a continuation of information sessions throughout the region and a specific review of the evidence-based requirements of the subgrantees. The proposed review panel -- including early childhood development experts, evaluation experts, local funders, and community volunteers -- is well-designed to ensure the selection of subgrantees with a high likelihood of success.

The applicant provides eight criteria by which it will assess a subgrantee’s capacity for growth. The criteria (e.g., sound mission, well-governed Board of Directors, financial health and trust of the organization by the community) provide baseline indicators of overall organizational health, a prerequisite for the capacity to grow; however, they do not present a thorough assessment methodology to ensure a reasonable level of success.

Beyond quarterly technical assistance meetings with the SIF Director and monthly check-ins by the Program Director to determine the topics for the quarterly meetings, the applicant does not clearly detail or outline the extent to which they will support subgrantee growth.

The applicant has an 85 year history of distributing funds and recently implemented a new software tool to help measure and report outcomes using a Return on Investment metric. The agency has the capacity to undertake the competitive subgrant selection process outlined in the application.

The applicant does not propose a process for capturing or sharing best practices beyond an annual public presentation day to allow nonprofit, government, business and other leaders to learn about the subgrantees’ models and outcomes.

The ability of the applicant to provide program support and oversight is ambiguous. The professional experience and relevant advanced degrees of the two senior management and financial oversight positions are well suited to monitor the overall grant. However, oversight and implementation of the proposed program activities is split between an existing Director positions to which the SIF Program Director will report. The existing Director does not appear to have the strongest background with regards to relevant advanced degrees or professional experience. The SIF Program Director position will be hired pending approval of the grant but the applicant does not provide a description of the qualifications or characteristics they will be seeking in the position.

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The applicant is a past recipient of federal funds, has the experience and staff capacity to successfully manage the proposed Social Innovation Fund grant program.

The financial oversight plan lacks sufficient information about the direct oversight of budget decisions by program director and the intended compliance measures for subgrantees.

The applicant has a track record of raising funds from other sources and provides an outline of the sources they will approach for matching funds. The applicant does not specify plans for assisting the subgrantees in securing the required match.

- The applicant adequately provides some sources to back its assertion of the needs for the implementation of the program being offered in the target area. That includes data identifying the 10-parish Baton Rouge area as a location with limited resources and an urgent need for this type of intervention.

As part of the comprehensive plan for carrying out a competitive subgrantee selection process, applicant will publicize the RFP in many different ways and approaches including social media, with partner agencies and others in order to have a diverse pool of possible subgrantees.

Applicant will include an interdisciplinary review panel composed of four major diverse groups of professionals and community representatives who will bring different skills and experience to the table when evaluating subgrantees. This panel includes experts with experience working with childhood development, evaluations, local foundations and community volunteers. By proving this professional diversity, applicant presents a particularly strong approach for the review process.

The applicant has substantial experience selecting and awarding grants to nonprofits. That experience includes an 85 year history of distributing funds to the Baton Rouge area and different non-profit community organizations. In the 2011-2012 cycles, the organization distributed over \$6 million, through series of 46 local non-profit agencies.

Applicant also provides specific examples of past efforts supporting grantee programs and the improvements that came into effect due to these efforts. Applicant cited its work with Catholic Charities in particular, and the positive outcomes and positive changes that have come out of that relationship.

However, the applicant does not provide enough specific demographic characteristics for the population being targeted, particularly dealing with the specific racial and ethnic composition and their genders. These variables (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender) were completely missing from the narrative.

A lot of the statistical data and references provided by the applicant do not actually provide citations. For example the number of people completing high school in the region is missing the citation/reference, and several others.

Despite the fact that applicant describes the basic criteria by which the applicants will be evaluated, applicant does not clearly define the way that the different criteria will be weighted when evaluating proposals and selecting the winning proposals.

Applicant briefly presents a process to identify subgrantees that meet the Social Innovation Fund's requirements for preliminary evidence. Nevertheless, the applicant does not expand the description fully and the components of the narrative are somewhat unclear.

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*The second stage of expert review for the 2012 SIF competition was the Evaluation Review. The Evaluation Review focused on the quality of the applicant's response in the Proposal for Evaluation in the Program Design category and Evaluation Experience in the Organizational Capacity category.*

**Evaluation Reviewers' Summary Comments:**

- The applicant is proposing that its subgrantees will replicate or expand programs that are either well-known, evidence-based models (NFP, for example) or new models that are based on best practices in childhood development. Their selection process for subgrantees is very strong, will utilize relevant experts (including members of the evaluation team), and will ensure that subgrantees come in with at least preliminary evidence. They have proposed to institute a number of solid processes that will allow subgrantees to achieve at least moderate evidence in the timeframe of the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant such as using the well-established EDI as a system of shared outcomes and assisting subgrantees with technical assistance and data collection.

The applicant will partner with LSU/Tulane and UCLA for evaluation activities. These are respected institutions with experience in childhood development evaluation and in using the EDI tool. Furthermore, requiring subgrantees to contribute to the evaluation expenses is a thoughtful way to ensure full participation and buy-in to the evaluation. Although the applicant has partnered with Dr. Nagle for one year, the narrative does not provide any examples of the applicant's experience managing program evaluations or contracting for such work.

The applicant has revamped their grantee selection process over the past four years so that it now focuses on making evidence-based funding decisions. The selection process appears to be lengthy, rigorous, and focused on evidence of successfully achieving desired outcomes. The applicant states that they have instituted a plan for grantees to "implement course corrective systems" but does not provide any examples of how or when this has actually occurred.

The applicant will utilize the expertise of staff (including a new position, the SIF Program Director), the Impact Cabinet, and the contracted evaluation partners. The overall evaluation budget is adequate, but the budgeted time for current staff is a bit low so the applicant will need to ensure that the SIF Program Director has appropriate skills and expertise in evaluation.

- The applicant has made a compelling case for the need to support early childhood interventions in the Greater Baton Rouge area to ensure school readiness and lay a solid foundation for future success and economic well-being of children living in low-income households. The applicant has also done a good job discussing the models it intends to support and clearly has the processes and relationships in place to successfully see this initiative through. The applicant does not cite and discuss evidence from past evaluations that demonstrate that it has used evaluation findings to improve program performance and effectiveness. The applicant does not provide an explanation around the data collection and analysis plan for the initiative. The key indicator of success in this initiative is the results of the EDI for program beneficiaries. The applicant and its evaluation partner intend to compare these results with EDI results for non-beneficiaries. However, no details have been provided in the proposal that explain how data will be collected and used to measure success. There is also no discussion on the likely challenges that will be faced in collecting such data and strategies that will be used to overcome those challenges.